

# Motorized Personal Watercraft Action Plan

## Goal

To minimize disturbance of marine wildlife by motorized personal watercraft, minimize user conflicts between MPWC operators and other recreationalists, and provide opportunities for MPWC use within the MBNMS.

## Introduction

Motorized Personal Watercraft (MPWC) are small, fast, and highly maneuverable craft that possess unconventionally high thrust capability and horsepower relative to their size and weight. This characteristic enables them to make sharp turns at high speeds and alter direction rapidly, while maintaining controlled stability. Their small size, shallow draft, instant thrust, and “quick reflex” enable them to operate closer to shore and in areas that would commonly pose a hazard to conventional craft operating at comparable speeds. Many can be launched across a beach area, without the need for a launch ramp. Most MPWC are designed to shed water, enabling an operator to roll or swamp the vessel without serious complications or interruption of vessel performance. The ability to shunt water from the load carrying area exempts applicable MPWC from Coast Guard safety rating standards for small boats. MPWC are often designed to accommodate sudden separation and quick remount by a rider. MPWC are not commonly equipped for night operation and have limited instrumentation and storage space compared to conventional vessels. MPWC propelled by a directional water jet pump do not commonly have a rudder and must attain a minimum speed threshold to achieve optimal maneuverability. Most models have no steerage when the jet is idle.

Assessments of MPWC impacts indicate that unrestricted access to all reaches of the MBNMS by such craft would pose an unacceptable threat to wildlife and other ocean users. MPWC commonly accelerate and decelerate repeatedly and unpredictably, and travel at rapid speeds directly toward shore, while motorboats generally slow down as they approach shore. Accordingly, disturbance impacts associated with MPWC tend to be locally concentrated, producing effects that are more geographically limited yet potentially more severe than motorboat use, due to repeated disruptions and an accumulation of impacts in a shorter period of time. To prevent the disturbance of wildlife and other nearshore users, most MPWC have been restricted in protected marine areas adjacent to, or overlapping the MBNMS (e.g. the Gulf of the Farallones National Marine Sanctuary and nearshore areas of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area, Marin County, California State Parks, and the City of Santa Cruz). Current MBNMS management of MPWC is consistent with actions taken in these jurisdictions.

The majority of MPWC currently operated within the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary (MBNMS) are compact water jet-propelled craft that shed water from the passenger spaces. Larger size models are preferred in the high-energy ocean environment for increased power, range, and towing ability. Popular uses are operation within the surf zone, weaving in and out of wave lines, launching off the crest of waves and wakes, and towing surfers into large and/or remote wave breaks. MPWC are often operated in pairs or larger groups for camaraderie and improved safety. Use of MPWC to tow surfers into large waves at Mavericks, a surf break off Pillar Point in San Mateo County, is a relatively new technique in surfing, allowing surfers to catch massive waves previously considered too large to catch. Use of MPWC for this purpose has increased dramatically during the past few years at Mavericks. Tow-in surfing activity has been increasing at many traditional surfing locations in the MBNMS, regardless of surf conditions. On days with moderate or low surf, MPWC provide ready access and improved flexibility for positioning surfers on wave breaks. On high surf days, MPWC provide access to areas normally

considered too dangerous by paddle surfers. The MBNMS has received complaints by surfers, beachgoers, and coastal residents that the use of MPWC in traditional surfing areas has produced conflicts with other ocean users and caused disturbance of wildlife. During the designation of the MBNMS, the operation of MPWC in nearshore areas was identified as an activity that should be prohibited to avoid such impacts.

***Proposed New Definition:*** The MBNMS will propose a modification to the definition of *Motorized personal watercraft (MPWC)* to include all MPWC regardless of number of operators or passengers. The definition adopted in 1992 did not include MPWC that could carry 3 or more individuals which is typical of the MPWC used in the marine environment. A revised definition will be consistent with the original intention of restricting MPWC to the four zones off the harbors of the MBNMS.

### **Strategy MPWC-1: Maintain Motorized Personal Watercraft Zones**

The MBNMS has employed a zoning approach to MPWC management for ten years (since 1992) to prevent disturbance of marine wildlife, nearshore habitats, and other coastal users by MPWC. Four existing zones were sited based upon the location of public launch facilities, traditional areas of MPWC use, and local wildlife and marine recreation patterns. Zone boundaries are marked by a total of 21 yellow MBNMS can buoys and 4 Coast Guard navigation aids. The markers are positioned along the perimeter of each zone; however, they present added navigation hazards to mariners.

#### ***Activity 1.1: Improve Buoy Marking System***

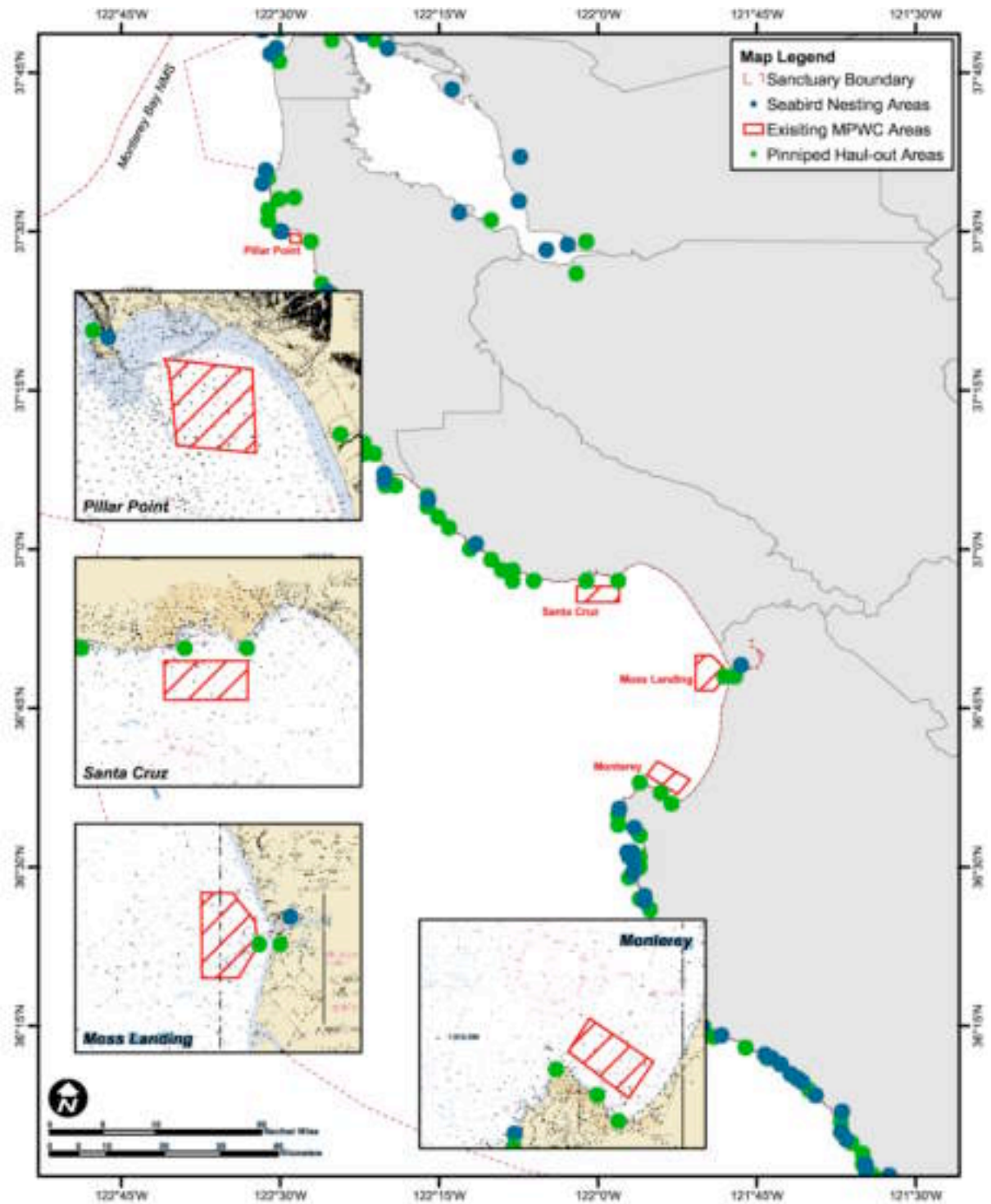
The visibility of the zone marker buoys will be enhanced by adding PVC piping to extend buoy height above the waterline and to mark buoys to identify their purpose. MBNMS will incorporate prominent United States Coast Guard navigational aids into boundary marking schemes whenever possible.

#### ***Activity 1.2: Implement Ongoing Buoy Maintenance Program To Assure Buoys Are On Station***

The MBNMS will contract with a private vendor to conduct regular maintenance and any necessary modifications to the buoy system to help assure that buoys remain on station, minimize safety hazards, and correctly mark the prescribed zones.

*Partners:* United States Coast Guard

*Figure MPWC 1. MPWC Zones*



## **Strategy MPWC-2: Consider Zone Restriction Exceptions**

A change in the definition of MPWCs would limit MPWC training by public safety agencies as well as tow-in surfing activities (a sport that has evolved and expanded since MBNMS designation). Administrative policies and conditions must be developed to authorize any controlled operation of MPWC in areas of the MBNMS outside established operating zones. At least eight State and local public safety agencies currently operate MPWC for purposes of surf zone rescue within the MBNMS. In order to use MPWC for response in critical areas, local response agencies must train their MPWC operators to be familiar with the nearshore areas and ocean dynamics in which they may be called to operate. Since many response areas lie outside of MBNMS MPWC zones, public safety personnel need an administrative mechanism that facilitates familiarization and proficiency training.

The nearshore area immediately southwest of Pillar Point, California (popularly named “Mavericks”) is known world-wide as a unique surfing venue where waves reaching a height of 50-60 feet occur periodically each year. It is the only site of its kind in the continental United States. Since the Mavericks area is outside of MBNMS MPWC operating zones, special administrative provisions would be required to allow MPWCs to tow in surfers at this location.

### ***Activity 2.1: Official Protocols For Training of Public Safety Personnel***

MBNMS staff will consult with public safety agencies assigned jurisdictional authority within the MBNMS area to develop MPWC training protocols for their emergency response personnel. At a minimum, the protocols will include the following terms and conditions:

- A. Training shall be conducted only for official government public safety personnel assigned to local units exercising jurisdictional authority within the MBNMS
- B. Training shall not occur in sensitive habitat areas or disturb marine wildlife
- C. Training shall not interfere with other ocean users
- D. Authorized public safety agencies shall select training areas and periods in coordination with the MBNMS
- E. Authorized public safety agencies shall notify the MBNMS in advance of ocean training sessions
- F. Trainees shall use only agency authorized equipment that is marked for ready identification by the public
- G. Trainees shall perform training in accordance with strict standards prescribed by their respective agencies

*Partners:* United States Coast Guard, California Department of Parks and Recreation; Cities of Marina, Santa Cruz, Capitola, Half Moon Bay, and Monterey; Pillar Point Harbor; and Pacific Grove Ocean Rescue

### ***Activity 2.2: Authorization for Training of Public Safety Personnel***

NOAA will authorize public safety agencies operating MPWC within the MBNMS to conduct MPWC training for locally assigned personnel.

### ***Activity 2.3: Consider Special Use Permit program for Individuals to Conduct Tow-in Surfing Activities at Mavericks (Pillar Point)***

GFNMS, in coordination with MBNMS may consider a special use permit program for the limited permitting of individuals to conduct MPWC tow-in operations at Mavericks during very high surf periods. This may be subject to the following minimum guidelines.

- A. Site-specific training for site-specific natural resource management and protection

- B. A limited entry, special use permit system (fee included). Permits will be issued to not more than 20 teams (each team must have 2-3 members and only 1 MPWC) on a first-come first-served basis. Permit fees will be used to offset monitoring and enforcement costs
- C. Permit fees will be assessed in amounts sufficient to present a zero net cost to the government for administering this program. Costs include (but are not limited to) training, training materials, permitting, decals, education materials, monitoring and enforcement
- D. Permits will be issued only for the purpose of conducting surfing activities
- E. Permitted access to Mavericks will only be authorized when the official reported swell height at NOAA National Data Buoy #46012 (Half Moon Bay buoy) reaches 20 feet or greater
- F. Maximum number of MPWC allowed on-site at Mavericks is 20 craft at any time
- G. Monitoring and enforcement will be required for 8-10 hours/day during high surf advisory days (approximately 5 - 15 per year) to assure compliance with the permit program
- H. General permit conditions
- I. Seasonal restrictions
- J. Minimal sea state, time and tide level requirements
- K. Proof of MPWC training certification (classroom)
- L. Proof of insurance and required minimum coverage limits for environmental damage
- M. MPWC must tow a sled
- N. Permit holders cannot access the site on MBNMS authorized competition days
- O. Access to and from Mavericks shall be along a defined route from the harbor entrance to the green United States Coast Guard bell buoy "3," then northward along the west side of Black Hand reef to the Mavericks wave break
- P. Authorized craft must remain south of the southern tip of Pillar Point and must be actively engaged in surfing activities at Mavericks or transiting to and from the Mavericks surfing site along the authorized access route
- Q. MPWC operation is prohibited in the lagoon area between Pillar Point, Sail Rock, and the breakwater.
- R. Authorized craft must bear an official MBNMS decal on the hull as prescribed in the permit
- S. Permit holders must obey all State and Federal boating laws
- T. Permit holders must carry photo ID

A permit program for limited use of MPWC at Mavericks could be administered under existing permit authority provided in section 310 of the National Marine Sanctuaries Act.

***Activity 2.4: Permit Program for Sponsored Tow-In Surfing Competitions at Mavericks (Pillar Point)***

The GFNMS, in coordination with the MBNMS will establish guidelines for the limited permitting of individuals to conduct MPWC tow-in operations at Mavericks as part of specified big-wave competition events if a special use permit is issued. The guidelines will (at a minimum) include:

- A. A limit of no more than two sponsored competition events per year
- B. The event sponsor will register all teams and craft and apply for a single permit for the event for a specified day or high surf episode
- C. All general conditions specified in Activity 2.3 above would apply except that competition activities would be authorized for the entire day

- D. Access will only be permitted during high surf advisory periods declared by the National Weather Service, NOAA
- E. Maximum number of MPWC allowed on-site at Mavericks is 20 craft
- F. The event sponsor will purchase liability insurance with minimum coverage limits (to-be-determined) for environmental damage caused as a result of the sponsored event
- G. The event sponsor will be responsible for post-event cleanup of any spectator debris that can/does enter the ocean and for any collateral damage to the MBNMS by event spectators
- H. Monitoring and enforcement will be required for 8-10 hours/day during competition days to assure compliance with permit program
- I. The event sponsor will pay to NOAA the total cost for enforcement monitoring, interpretive signage, and outreach materials related to the event

### **Strategy MPWC-3: Conduct Educational Outreach to MPWC Community**

In order to inform users about use of the zones, eight large enamel interpretive signs were designed, produced, and installed at launch ramps in the four harbors within the MBNMS. The signs are customized to each harbor location with text of MBNMS MPWC regulations superimposed on a map depicting the nearest operating zone and access route. The MBNMS also designed and published several thousand brochures to provide personal instructions for using the zones and complying with MBNMS regulations. The brochures were distributed to harbor offices and some retail shops.

#### ***Activity 3.1: Improve Interpretive Materials (e.g. signs, brochures, videos)***

The following actions will be taken to improve outreach materials:

- A. Amend the primary outreach brochure to describe the zoning system and how to use the buoy system to remain within the authorized zones
- B. Consider making brochures multi-lingual
- C. Create new MPWC instructional signs with MPWC regulations and information
- D. Ensure that a bold header identifies the signs clearly as regulatory signs
- E. Consider making signs bilingual (English/Spanish)
- F. Include a notice of penalties for violating MPWC regulations on signs
- G. Ensure that MPWC instructional signs are large and customized to local areas
- H. Replace instructional signs that are missing from launch ramp areas
- I. Place a special sign at Kirby Park notifying users that MPWC operation within Elkhorn Slough is prohibited
- J. Produce an interpretive video/DVD suitable for MPWC clubs and users, describing MBNMS MPWC regulations and guidelines and proper riding etiquette

#### ***Activity 3.2: Improve Interpretive Methods (e.g. presentations, dock walkers, sign placement, information distribution)***

The following actions will be taken to improve outreach:

- A. Conduct a needs assessment survey to determine the most effective method(s) of contacting MPWC users
- B. Review locations of instructional signs to assure they are in prominent locations at launch ramps
- C. Based on the results of the needs assessment, conduct targeted outreach to MPWC user groups, clubs, retailers, renters, repairers, etc.
- D. Coordinate with volunteer organizations and harbormasters to provide interpretive information to MPWC operators at launch ramps

- E. Add information on MBNMS MPWC regulations to the California Department of Boating and Waterways website

***Activity 3.3: Install a NOAA Weather Kiosk at Pillar Point Harbor Launch Ramp for Use By MPWC Operators, Surfers, Boaters, Fishermen, etc.***

A weather kiosk should be placed at a prominent location for ready access by permitted MPWC operators to help determine if appropriate sea conditions exist for MPWC operation at Mavericks. The kiosk would additionally benefit other ocean users as well. The weather kiosk will include a touch screen computer system linked to real-time weather and oceanographic information from the National Weather Service and National Data Buoy Center.

***Activity 3.4: Install A Link on the Front Page of the MBNMS and the GFNMS Website for Instant Access to Real-Time Weather and Oceanographic Data from the National Weather Service and National Data Buoy Center***

This aid would provide ready access by permitted MPWC tow-in operators to information that will help determine if appropriate sea conditions exist for MPWC operation at Mavericks. It should also provide useful information to other MBNMS users.

*Partners:* Surfrider Foundation, Personal Watercraft Industry Association, American Watercraft Association, California Department of Boating and Waterways, United States Coast Guard

## **Strategy MPWC-4: Enhance Enforcement Efforts**

Oversight and management of MPWC zones requires dedicated enforcement surveillance and rapid response to suspected violations. Harbor patrols and other harbor-based enforcement agencies are uniquely situated to perform this mission, but would require training and financial support. Harbor-based peace officers are familiar with MPWC use patterns in their areas, often receive initial complaint calls from the public, have immediate access to MPWC zones, and are most familiar with harbor areas and adjacent waters.

*Related Strategies:* MMST-8

***Activity 4.1: Expand Deputization of Local Peace Officers***

The MBNMS will develop a plan for utilizing harbor police and other ocean-based law enforcement units to assist the MBNMS in MPWC enforcement. The purpose for expanded deputization will be to increase surveillance patrols and enforcement personnel to monitor MPWC zones and harbor launch points. The MBNMS should consider creating an enforcement task force of marine enforcement agencies to coordinate support of MBNMS enforcement goals.

***Activity 4.2: Commit Sufficient Enforcement Funding to Support Deputization Agreements***

NOAA should provide adequate funding to fully support *Activity 4.1* above and shall seek funding from both NOAA and non-NOAA sources (e.g. California Department of Boating and Waterways).

***Activity 4.3: Permit Enforcement at Mavericks Using Permit Fee Funding***

Fees collected for special use permits (if authorized for use at Mavericks ) will be used to pay for additional monitoring and enforcement of MPWC activity at Half Moon Bay and Pillar Point.

NOAA Office of Law Enforcement, United States Coast Guard, California Department of Parks and Recreation, California Department of Fish and Game, California Highway

Patrol, Harbor Police, Sheriff Offices, Police Departments, California Department of  
Boating and Waterways